

Stories of Saints and Sultans: Re-membering History at the Sufi Shrines of Aurangabad

NILE GREEN

Oxford University

Introduction

Encounters between Sufi saints and Muslim rulers have played a long and important role in the textual historical traditions of Muslim South Asia. Historians of the sultanates of Delhi and the Deccan writing in Persian such as Ziyā al-dīn Baranī and Abū'l Qāsim Firishta peppered their accounts with such narratives, much to the distaste of their nineteenth century British translators who frequently excised such episodes wholesale.¹ Some of the earliest Sufi literature composed in South Asia, such as the 'recorded conversations' (*malfūzāt*) written in the circle of Nizām al-dīn Awliyā of Delhi (d.725/1325), make clear the importance of this *topos* of the interview between the saint and king.² The actual historical nature of such encounters is sometimes difficult to ascertain in view of the didactic and moralizing dimensions to both medieval historiography and Sufi literature in Persian. However, the abundant remaining examples of finely built medieval Sufi hospices (known variously as a *khānaqāh*, *zāwiyah* or *takiyah*) and their accompanying royal charters do assure us that such

The research and writing of this article was supported by the Ouseley Memorial Scholarship held at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies and the Milburn Junior Research Fellowship in the Faculty of Theology, Oxford University. I am grateful to Stuart Blackburn for his comments on an earlier version of the article.

¹ For further discussion, see P. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing* (London: Luzac & Co., 1960).

² See B. B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: The Extant Literature of Pre-Mughal Indian Sufism* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978). For further discussion, see S. Digby, 'The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India', *Iran* 28 (1990) and K. A. Nizami, 'Early Indo-Muslim Mystics and Their Attitude Towards the State', *Islamic Culture* 23–24 (1949–50). For Iran, see L. G. Potter, 'Sufis and Sultans in Post-Mongol Iran', *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994). For a more general treatment, see O. Safi, 'Bargaining with Baraka: Persian Sufism, "Mysticism", and Pre-Modern Politics', *Muslim World* 90, 3–4 (2000).

encounters belonged to the real as well as the written world.³ And this should perhaps be a matter of little surprise, for if there is one thing that discussions of Sufis in medieval Indo-Persian literature make clear, it is that notable Sufis were to be regarded as men of power. It was this power—particularly the power to foretell and even shape future events, though also the power of ‘legitimation’ more familiar to the historian—that charted some of the parameters of such Sufi and royal exchanges.⁴

The twin figures of the saint and the king occupied a central place in the cultural imagination of Muslims in premodern South Asia, just as parallel figures played key roles in Hindu as well as European written and oral literatures.⁵ Despite the rapid and accelerating changes in Indian society in recent decades, oral traditions have continued to play an important role in preserving the historical memory of different communities.⁶ Reflecting the recent interest in oral ethnohistorical

³ For studies of specific royal and Sufi concurrences in South Asian history, see R. M. Eaton, ‘The Court and the Dargāh in the Seventeenth Century Deccan’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 10 (1973), Y. Friedmann, ‘The Naqshbandis and Awrangzēb: A Reconsideration’, in M. Gaborieau, A. Popovic and T. Zarcone (eds), *Naqshbandis: Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique musulman* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1990) and I. A. Zilli, ‘Chishtis and the State: A Case Study of Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia's Relations with the Khalji Sultans’ in N. Ahmad & I. H. Siddiqui (eds), *Islamic Heritage in South Asian Subcontinent*, vol. 1 (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1998). Outside South Asia, see H. Hallenberg, ‘The Sultan Who Loved Sufis: How Qāyṭbāy Endowed a Shrine Complex in Dasūq’, *Mamluk Studies Review* 4 (2000) and J. Sourdel-Thomine, ‘Les Conseils du šayh al-Harawī ? un prince Ayyubide’, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 17 (1962).

⁴ Recent research would suggest that such abilities have been recognized from the beginnings of Muslim history. See C. Robinson, ‘Prophecy and Holy Men in Early Islam’ in J. Howard-Johnston & P. A. Hayward (eds), *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵ For South Asia, see S. Bayly, ‘Cult Saints, Heroes, and Warrior Kings: South Asian Islam in the Making’, in K. E. Yandell & J. J. Paul (eds), *Religion and Public Culture* (London: Curzon, 2000), H. Kulke (ed.), *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Manohar, 1993) and K. Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). For European saintly traditions, see C. Hole, *Saints in Folklore* (London: C. Bell & Sons, 1965), C. Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and J. L. Nelson, ‘Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship’, in D. Baker (ed.), *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁶ For theoretical perspectives on oral tradition and the study of the past, see I. Copland, ‘The Historian as Anthropologist: “Ethnohistory” and the Study of South Asia’, *South Asia* 11, 2 (1988) and P. Heehs, ‘Myth, History and Theory’, *History and Theory* 33, 1 (1994). For fine illustrations of the usage of South Asian oral traditions

traditions in South Asia, this article examines the oral tradition that surrounds the Sufi shrines (*dargāhs*) of the Deccan city of Aurangabad, a tradition whose narratives are especially concerned with encounters between the city's Sufi saints and its erstwhile Muslim rulers and their representatives.⁷ The narratives which are examined relate to the cults surrounding three Sufi shrines constructed in Aurangabad during the period of its early heyday as the Mughal capital of the Deccan and subsequently as the founding capital of Hyderabad State.⁸

Originally founded under the name of Khirki by the Nizam Shahs of Ahmadnagar in 1019/1610, Aurangabad was re-founded by Awrangzeb in 1092/1681 after the region's conquest by the Mughal armies. Like the other principal Mughal urban centres it received the accolade of a royal sobriquet. Until the death of Awrangzeb in 1118/1707, followed by his burial at the Sufi shrine of Zayn al-dīn Shīrāzī (d.771/1369) in the nearby Chishtī shrine-centre of Khuldabad, Aurangabad acted as the operations centre for the wider Mughal conquests of the independent Deccan kingdoms and the

in historical enquiry, see N. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), S. Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), W. Singer, *Creating Histories: Oral Narratives and the Politics of History Making* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) and A. Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷ On the oral tradition of the Aurangabad Sufis, see also N. S. Green, 'Oral Competition Narratives of Muslim and Hindu Saints in the Deccan', *Asian Folklore Studies* (forthcoming). For other oral narrative traditions concerning Sufi saints, see S. Digby, 'To Ride a Tiger or a Wall? Strategies of Prestige in Indian Sufi Legend', in W. M. Callewaert & R. Snell (eds), *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), *idem.*, *Wonder Tales of South Asia* (Jersey: Orient Monographs, 2000), L. Elwell-Sutton, 'The Darvish in Persian Folklore', *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Orientalists, 1964* (Delhi: 1968) and M. Van Bruinessen, 'Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mina Sahib and Various Avatars of a Running Wall', *Turcica: Revue d'Études Turcs* 21–23 (1991). On oral literatures elsewhere in the Muslim world, see H. M. El-Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt, collected, translated, and edited, with Middle Eastern and African parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and J. Knappert, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

⁸ On Sufi saint traditions in modern South Asia, see e.g. S. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), A. Buchler, 'Currents of Sufism in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Indo-Pakistan: An Overview', *Muslim World* 87, 3–4 (1997), H. Chambert Loir & C. Guillot (eds), *Le Culte des saints dans le monde musulman* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1995) and C. Liebeskind, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

struggle against the Marathas.⁹ After the emperor's death the city remained the Deccan's principal centre for half a century and served as the first capital of Hyderabad State, which began to take shape in the 1720s as a result of the increasing independence of Nizām al-Mulk Āsaf Jāh (d.1161/1748) from Mughal control.¹⁰ This period as a whole witnessed the Deccan's immense wealth being drawn to the city, an affluence that found expression in vast civic and private building projects. These included arguably the finest example of all Mughal architecture in the Deccan in the form of a 'second Taj Mahal' to the emperor's wife, a royal palace built after the examples of Delhi and Agra and a variety of sub-imperial projects including havelis, gardens and shrines for notable Sufis resident in the city.¹¹ However, the city fell into decline in the decades after the shift of the capital to Hyderabad during the reign of Nizām 'Alī Khān (1176/1762–1219/1803), with early nineteenth century British travellers remarking on the prospect of the grandiose ruins that surrounded the much-reduced city.¹² However, as the second city of Hyderabad State, Aurangabad remained a city of regional importance until Hyderabad's forcible dissolution in 1948.¹³ In recent decades its allotment to the state of Maharashtra and its relative proximity to Bombay have led to considerable industrialisation and a corresponding increase in population fuelled partly by migration to the city.¹⁴

However, as in many Indian cities, an earlier townscape still defines much of the character of the city, connecting the daily lives of its inhabitants in however feeble a way to those of their predecessors.

⁹ On the role of Aurangabad in the Maratha wars and the city's continued importance after the death of Awrangzeb, see S. Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ On the history of Hyderabad State, see S. Chander, 'From a Pre-Colonial Order to a Princely State: Hyderabad in Transition c.1748–1865' (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1987) and K. G. Schwerin, *Indirekte Herrschaft und Reformpolitik im indischen Fürstenstaat Hyderabad 1853–1911* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980).

¹¹ For further details, see G. Michell & M. Zebrowski, *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates*, *New Cambridge History of India*, 1:7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹² See e.g. J. B. Seely, *The Wonders of Ellora* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1824), pp. 346–7. Seely described the ruined city as 'a memento of princely folly and pride' (p. 347).

¹³ On the history of the Aurangabad region up to this point, see P. V. Kate, *Marathwada Under the Nizams, 1724–1948* (Delhi: Mittal, 1987).

¹⁴ For a modern sociological study of Aurangabad's Muslim community, see M. A. Khan, 'Social Change among the Muslims of Aurangabad City', in A. A. Engineer (ed.), *Problems of Muslim Women in India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995).

The past needs always to be mediated and handed on and for many of the residents of Aurangabad this mediation has been achieved in part through the combination of oral tradition and the surviving architectural signs of the past.¹⁵ For the past is primarily known to the city's inhabitants in the form of its surviving architectural presence, amid which its Sufi shrines loomed large as among the few living architectural spaces connecting Aurangabad's past with its present. Other remnants, including walls, gateways and royal funerary and residential buildings, are also significant in clearly belonging to the same historical and cultural epoch. Yet these monumental pointers to the past required a narrative framework in order to be understood. Amid this wider process of configuring historical memory, the narrative figure of the saint gives structure to the wide plains of the past through descriptions of the saint's miraculous life-story which connect past and present experience in meaningful ways. With the figure of the saint forming a common point of reference, the narratives that have gathered around him embrace the kings, courtiers and other notable figures from the city's past, as well as the imperial city itself as their setting. The oral tradition surrounding the city's saints has not merely provided the distinctly religious biographies of a local pantheon of Muslim saints, but has also formed a history of the city and its Muslim community. It has presented a past (and so by implication a present) in which God's presence in the world is made manifest through the actions of his saintly representatives and has in this sense formed a historical tradition that might be seen as combining local and wider Indo-Islamic features. This is by no means a historical tradition shared by the whole of the city's swelling population, a large proportion of which has in recent decades migrated to the city from the surrounding countryside and elsewhere, particularly from Punjab and Gujarat. It is rather a tradition limited to what might be termed its recitational community, composed of the thousands of Aurangabad's inhabitants who visit the shrines. If reformist Muslims (as well, of course, as secularists and members of other religious groups) reject this saint-centred view of the past, it was nonetheless a vision of the world shared by many premodern Persian historians. Such a continuity

¹⁵ Such an intertwining has a long pedigree in Muslim thought, as witnessed in the historico-archaeological masterpiece of al-Bīrūnī (d.440/1048), *Āthār al-bāqīyyah*. Partly also under the influence of European antiquarianism, in Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Āthār al-sanādīd* (1263/1827) it also informed the fusion of place and historical memory in Delhi.

in worldviews shows the important connections that exist between oral and textual traditions through time and so lends important insights into the ways in which cultural knowledge is transmitted and preserved.¹⁶

Although not every telling of the Aurangabad narratives occurs necessarily within the shrines themselves, the stories do require the shrines' territorial presence, as well as that of other topographic features of the surrounding city, as their *mise en scène*. It is no coincidence that there are no stories about saints in the city whose burial sites are unknown; nor, conversely, are there shrines about whose inhabitants there are no stories.¹⁷ Almost all of the Aurangabad narratives are therefore related to a specific place and it is this that lends them a rhetorical quality suggestive of concrete evidence. The reality of their settings has contributed strongly to the belief that they actually *happened*, that they refer to real events and not merely fictional ones. It is for this reason also that such narratives need to be seen as histories and not simply as folktales. More than mere entertainments, the narratives of the saints have created a community history that is rooted in the surrounding urban environment of the city (as opposed to the overwhelmingly Hindu countryside) and proven through the presence of the topographical evidence of that past that makes up the Mughal city's architectural legacy. Architecture, narrative and *dramatis personae* conspire in this way to form the living historical presence of a narrative townscape, a city of stories.

This narrative townscape has contributed to the private hopes of salvation for members of its community and their religious and historical identification with their surrounding urban environment. As a means of anchoring Islam to their local territory, like many other histories it has reified a presence in the past that vindicates a presence in the present. Oral tradition thus reflects the ways in

¹⁶ On the question of folk motifs in Persian Historiography, see J. R. Perry, 'Blackmailing Amazons and Dutch Pigs: A Consideration of Epic and Folktale Motifs in Persian Historiography', *Iranian Studies* 19 (1986). For further discussion of the interaction of Sufi oral and textual traditions, see M. A. Mills, 'Folk Tradition in the Masnavi and the Masnavi in Folk Tradition', in A. Banani, R. Hovanusian & G. Sabegh (eds), *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁷ There are of course tombs of saints about which *less* is known, for in such cases site and narrative decline together in the dual process that brings about the death of a cult. The material upkeep of a tomb and narrative commemoration of the interred are in this sense parallel procedures of cult maintenance. Place and narrative are interdependent, each ultimately requiring the other for its continued existence.

which many of the Muslims of Aurangabad have sought to maintain their history and identity among a wider population of non-Muslims. The role played by Hindu and Maratha nationalist movements in Maharashtra, culminating in recent suggestions to rename Aurangabad as Sambhajinagar, are another important contextual factor to this shaping of a community memory.¹⁸ In a region in which the 'police action' which accompanied the transfer of Hyderabad State from Muslim rule to majority rule is still remembered, the oral tradition of the saints has also served to keep alive the memory of an age of Muslim grandeur and self-rule. Stories of Muslim palaces, kings and powerful saints are all the more significant when seen against the background of the generally low social position of Muslims in the city that forms the living context of their telling. In forming a means of mediation through which their reciters can navigate between present and past time, the stories of the saints reveal from this perspective as much about the present as they do about the past.

Peopling the stories of the saints with the historical personalities of courtiers and kings has long been a feature of the Persian and Urdu textual tradition as well as oral tradition. Sufi hagiographical texts sometimes included potted biographies of kings or notables associated with their saints, anchoring the royal and the saintly past together for their mutual preservation. This was the case with *Rawzat al-awliyā* (1161/1748), the famous account of Aurangabad's neighbouring saints of Khuldabad written by Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1200/1786), as well as with the later Urdu *Tazkira-e awliyā-e dakan* (1912–13) of 'Abd al-Jabbār Khān Malkapūrī and *Rawzat al-aqtāb* (1931) of Rawnaq 'Alī which also relate to the saints of the region.¹⁹ But oral narratives form not only a way of knowing the past but also a discrete commentary upon it. According to this envisioning of history, it is not in reality the politically powerful who govern the world, but rather God's friends, the Sufi saints.²⁰ In these narratives the saints overrule the dictates

¹⁸ See e.g. B. G. Gokhale, *The Fiery Quill: Nationalism and Literature in Maharashtra* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1998). On Maratha kings in oral and written poetic traditions, see J. W. Laine, 'Śivājī as Epic Hero' in G. D. Sontheimer (ed.), *Folk Culture, Folk Religion and Oral Traditions as a Component in Maharashtrian Culture* (Delhi: Manohar, 1995).

¹⁹ Ghulām 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Rawzat al-awliyā* (Kanpur: Liberty Art Press, 1416/1996) [Persian], 'Abd al-Jabbār Khān Malkapūrī, *Mahbūb al-zilmanān: tazkira-e awliyā-e dakan* (Hyderabad: Hasan Press, 1331/1912–13) [Urdu], Rawnaq 'Alī, *Rawzat al-aqtāb* (Aurangabad: Sawira Offset, 1420/2000) [Urdu].

²⁰ On these themes, see also V. Cornell, *The Dominion of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Mysticism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999) and E. B. Reeves, *The*

of monarchs, deciding upon the fortunes of kings as calmly as they do those of their poor clients from the city and its surrounding villages. Although this is an idea long familiar in a Sufi context, it represents more than an exclusively Sufi vision of power in the world, for it draws historical agency from the hands of the rich into those of the poor as represented by the saint, the holy *faqīr* (literally poor man) who is the apotheosis of the beggar. Yet such discourses of Sufi power are not transparent allegories of social protest or cathartic exercises in turning the world upside down.²¹ Rather they show through the medium of narrative how the worldly expression of Sufi devotionism is intrinsically bound up with power, showing spiritual power and overlordship as intimately connected with sovereignty over the physical world as well as the spiritual.²² Like the divine power from which it is seen to derive, the power of the saint is not solely spiritual but also temporal, even though like God's power itself its operation in this world is not always obvious or apparent. Such a dichotomy of the spiritual and worldly is thus not always appropriate to either premodern or some contemporary traditional Muslim social structures, such as *pīrẓādah* or *sayyid* lineages. For with its own power and rights, the sacred has often been seen as immanent and present in this world, tied to specific earthly geographies and persons on earth, to saintly shrines and their living representatives, as well as invisibly transcendent beyond it.

The first of the oral traditions to be discussed relates to the Naqshbandī Sufis Shāh Palangpōsh (d. 1110/1699) and Shāh Musāfir (d. 1126/1715), whose shared shrine (popularly known as Panchakki) was built by members of the Central Asian (*tūrānī*) faction of the Mughal imperial elite in Aurangabad, including several figures who helped lay the foundation of Nizām al-Mulk's independent power in the Deccan.²³ The second tradition relates to Shāh Nūr Hammāmī

Hidden Government: Ritual, Clientelism and Legitimation in Northern Egypt (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990).

²¹ For such a reading of oral traditions, see J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

²² For studies of this in action, see S. F. D. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and B. B. Lawrence, 'Veiled Opposition to Sufis in Muslim South Asia: Dynastic Manipulation of Mystical Brotherhoods by the Great Mughal', in F. De Jong & B. Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: 13 Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

²³ The history of the two Sufis, drawing on the author's memory and oral traditions current at their shrine, was written by one of their followers, Shāh

(d.1104/1692), whose shrine was built by the Mughal *diwān* of Aurangabad Diyānat Khān.²⁴ Although like many Indian Sufis, Shāh Nūr was probably originally unattached to any Sufi order (*tarīqah*), over time he gradually became associated with the Qādiriyya. The third tradition to be examined belongs to the most widely revered of all the Aurangabad saints, the Chishtī Sufi Nizām al-dīn Awrangābādī (d.1142/1729).²⁵

The Oral Tradition of Shāh Musāfir and Shāh Palangpōsh

It is the association of Shāh Musāfir with the emperor Awrangzeb that is the most widely recognized oral tradition in modern Aurangabad and one which has subsequently found expression in a wide variety of other contexts.²⁶ Although replete with accounts of the association of the *shaykhs* with many of the leading Central Asian notables associated with Mughal rule and the founder of Hyderabad State Nizām al-Mulk, the germinal oral tradition recorded in the *Malfūzāt-e Naqshbandiyyah* that was compiled by the Sufis' follower Shāh Mahmūd (d.1175/1762)

Mahmūd Awrangābādī circa 1148/1735. The text has been published as *Malfūzāt-e-Naqshbandiyyah: Hālāt-e-Hazrat Bābā Shāh Musāfir Sāhib* (Hyderabad: Nizāmat-e-'Umūr-e-Mazhabī-e-Sarkār-e-'Āli, 1358/1939-40, translated by S. Digby as *Sufis and Soldiers in Aurangzeb's Deccan*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). The Sufis also form the subject of Digby's article, 'The Naqshbandīs in the Deccan in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century A.O.: Bābā Palangpōsh, Bābā Musāfir and their Adherents', in Gaborieau *et al.* (1990).

²⁴ See Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma'āthir al-Umarā*, trans. H. Beveridge (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1911-52), pp. 475-7. More picturesque accounts of Shāh Nūr's life also feature in a number of later hagiographical texts, including Zahūr Khān Zahūr, *Nūr al-anwār* (an Urdu translation of the parts of *Bahār u Khizān* of Bāhā' al-dīn Hasan 'Urūj (fl.1194/1780) related to Shāh Nūr, ms, Collection of Mohammad Abd al-Hayy, Aurangabad) and the famous prosopography of the Deccan saints of Malkapūrī (1331/1912-13), pp. 1101-13.

²⁵ The primary source on Nizām al-dīn is his *malfūzāt* collected by his disciple Kāmgār Khān entitled *Ahsan al-shamā'il*. Nizām al-dīn himself wrote a treatise on Sufi meditation, *Nizām al-qulūb*. For a short overview of his life, including a bibliography of sources in Persian and Urdu, see M. Z. Siddiqui, 'Awrangābādī, Shah Nizām-al-dīn' in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

²⁶ English-language souvenir and guidebooks form an interesting case, stretching from the nineteenth century souvenir album of Major Gill and James Fergusson entitled *One Hundred Stereoscopic Illustrations on Architecture and Natural History in Western India* (London: Cundall, Downes, and Company, 1864, p. 72) to descriptions of the shrine in the modern day *Rough Guide* and *Lonely Planet* guidebooks. Via the internet, the tradition has now taken on a new dimension in cyberspace, where dozens of websites refer to Awrangzeb's devotion to Shāh Musāfir.

does not contain any story explicitly associating them with the person of Awrangzeb. Nonetheless, such traditions were certainly flourishing by the 1830s when an anonymous European visitor was the first to record them.²⁷ The tradition seems not to have developed out of the earlier oral tradition preserved in the saints' *maḥfūzāt*, despite its detailed accounts of the saints' connections with the imperial military elite. Instead, it would appear that the tradition evolved in part out of the visual evidence of the sheer architectural grandeur of the shrine at Panchakki. For given the royal associations of the other major saints of the city discussed below, it has seemed perhaps unlikely to the many who have gathered each evening at the shrine of Shāh Musāfir and Shāh Palangpōsh over the centuries to make a plea to the saints or else simply promenade by the pools and fountains there that the saints lacked a clear royal association when their mausoleum, mosque and *khānaqāh* so clearly outranked those of the other saints of the city who did claim such associations.

The keeper (*khādim*) of Shāh Musāfir's shrine at Panchakki related how 'four hundred years ago the great emperors came here . . . News [about Shāh Musāfir] spread everywhere and when these deeds were known, the kings and nawwabs heard about them and came to visit. Awrangzeb also came.'²⁸ A shopkeeper at the shrine similarly recalled how Shāh Musāfir was visited by many rulers who subsequently became his devotees, including Awrangzeb.²⁹ Yet beyond these bare but widely remembered particulars the tradition rarely blossoms into further detail. What has been important to the shrine's small active circle of devotees and, more importantly, to the remainder of the Muslims of the city who have concurred with the tradition, is the simple fact of the association. For through it the city's past is pieced together according to a *Weltanschauung* requiring the presence and power of God's saints in the world. In addition, in an important fillip to urban pride, Aurangabad so acquired the prestige of housing the resting-place of the spiritual master of the last of the great Mughals, challenging the claims of the rival sacred Sufi precincts of the nearby town of Khuldabad where the emperor was actually buried.

²⁷ Anon., 'The Durgahs and Mahomedan Saints of Hindostan', *Asiatic Journal* 19 (1836). The visitor also recorded a tradition claiming that Awrangzeb had gone so far as to personally stock the pool at Panchakki with costly fish brought from all over India.

²⁸ Osman Khan, interview, 7.11.99. This and the following narratives were recounted in Urdu and digitally recorded for later analysis and translation.

²⁹ Qazi Zaruruddin, interview, 4.12.99.

In a narrative describing the relationship between Awrangzeb and Shāh Palangpōsh, we see the saint himself in a position that stood above the power of the emperor but at the same time had the capacity to direct royal power in its own right. According to this tradition,

Shāh Palangpōsh was sitting under a tree. Three vagabonds (*shar pasand*) took Shāh Palangpōsh to a hilltop, dragged him there, where they used to use cannabis (*gānjā*) in a chillum. They used to take him there often in the morning, and Shāh Palangpōsh used to fill the chillum with cannabis, they used to smoke it and when intoxicated, they used to start kicking him. Shāh Palangpōsh used to roll down from the hilltop while they used to laugh. And again they would drag him up and so it went on every day. Shāh Palangpōsh never went away in fear. Then after thirty to forty days of this, Awrangzeb, in search of Shāh Palangpōsh, came to Aurangabad and entered the city from the west. As he came along by the site of Panchakki, he came by the hilltop and saw there the three mischief makers, fully intoxicated, and told the soldiers to prick their spears into their backs, and they were given fifty lashes each and three spear pricks. And Awrangzeb asked them, 'Do you know where Shāh Palangpōsh stays here?' They didn't answer since they didn't know who Shāh Palangpōsh was, but they told Awrangzeb, 'There is an old man sitting beneath the tree, and he might know who Shāh Palangpōsh is.' Then the soldiers dragged them to the tree, before Shāh Palangpōsh, and when Awrangzeb saw the old man, he saw he was Shāh Palangpōsh and bowed instantly before him, and sat with closed eyes and hands folded and took Shāh Palangpōsh's blessing. When the two vagabonds saw this, they were so shocked and scared that he would tell Awrangzeb and they would be hanged. But the saint didn't utter a word and kept all in his heart. And after taking his blessing, Awrangzeb went with his army to the city. Seeing all this, the three vagabonds bowed down and fell at Shāh Palangpōsh's feet, and started crying for help and asking for pardon with great reverence. And at this, Shāh Palangpōsh pardoned them and a time came, when they became great scholars of their age at the *khānaqāh*.³⁰

Two more traditions relate the *shaykhs* of Panchakki to the other ruling figures of Aurangabad's golden age. In the first of these narratives, the foundation of the rule of the Āsaf Jāh Nizams of Hyderabad is associated with the foundation of the shrine at Panchakki itself, while in the second, the hand of Shāh Musāfir is seen to be behind even the rule of the Maratha *pēshwās* who later gained control of much of the former territory of the fragmenting Mughal imperium. The first narrative locates its sequence of events at the Nawkhandah

³⁰ Yahya Maghrebi, one of Panchakki's two *sajjādah nashīns*, interview, 22.12.99.

palace which, at a short distance from Panchakki, acted as Nizām al-Mulk's residence in Aurangabad and subsequently as the palace of the later Nizams.

When Shāh Musāfir heard that the coronation ceremony of [Nizām al-Mulk] Āsaf Jāh was going on, he gave a big earthen pot to a *faqīr* who carried it on his head and placed it before the king at the time of the coronation ceremony. Āsaf Jāh knew that the *faqīr* was from Shāh Musāfir because he himself was a *murīd* of Bābā Shāh Palangpōsh and so he was usually in contact with them. The king then said, 'The *faqīr* has a very big question' (*faqīr kā bahut barā sawāl hai*); and all of the ornaments and gifts from the guests—jewellery and pearls and so on—were poured into the earthen pot by the king, so that the pot was completely filled with the entire wealth of that ceremony. Then the *faqīr* lifted the pot and carried it to Panchakki where he placed it before Shāh Musāfir. All of it was sold, and the money was sufficient to construct the entire aqueduct at Panchakki.³¹

The second narrative pursues the theme of saintly power further, showing Shāh Musāfir as the source of the Maratha ruler Bājī Rāo's own power and success and thereby the wider historical destiny of the Deccan. Here,

Bājī Rāo, one of the Maratha kings, was faced with rebellion and was thrown out of his kingdom, Maharashtra. After rescuing himself from the clutches of his enemies with some of his followers and warriors, he was passing along this place [Panchakki] and he wanted to stay for a while before moving on with the journey. When he came to the *khānaqāh*, he met Shāh Musāfir and Shāh Musāfir narrated the story [of the king's exile] and told him, 'You are facing a problem,' and permitted him to reside. The king resided over here and asked the saint to pray for him and find a solution. After some days, Shāh Musāfir ordered him to go back to his place, and he obeyed the order and went back. As he reached his province, the rebellion was crushed by some of his companions, and he was again given the throne and was honoured to rule the province again.³²

In these narratives we witness shades of competition between the saints of the city, for while it was Nizām al-dīn who became most commonly associated with the rise of Hyderabad State, none of the

³¹ Yahya Maghrebi, interview, 22.12.99.

³² Yahya Maghrebi, interview, 23.1.00. Maratha rulers have often been linked with Sufi figures in the Deccan's hagiographical traditions. Shīvājī, for example, is said to have been a follower of Shāh 'Ināyat Allāh (d. 1117/1705) of Balapur. See See Hādī Naqshbandī, *Rūh al-'Ināyat* (Balapur: Rashid Book Depot, 1417/1996), pp. 17–8.

city's saints have otherwise been seen to have influenced the Hindu rulers of the Deccan. While there is often a subversive quality to oral narratives, claiming power and its legitimacy for the marginalized, the converse is also often no less the case. Narratives that associate kings with saints also legitimize the right of the powerful to wield the power invested in them by the very fact of the saints' choice of their person in which to invest it. If the central issue in such narratives is power, then their effectiveness lies in their ability to resolve the issue while simultaneously leaving it open and unresolved. For there is a kind of negative capability in such narratives through which they can be interpreted in two opposing directions. On the one hand, the power of kings is legitimized through their association with saints, while on the other, that same power is taken from them by the saint as the symbolic representative of the poor to whom it ideally belongs. Both parties could be gratified by the same narrative, while the resting-places of power in the real world in fact remained unchanged. In this way, the narratives of the saint and the king form ways of re-interpreting the world and its masters in such a manner that their audiences are reconciled to it, despite in most cases their inability to actually change it. As a story type familiar from premodern Sufi and historiographical works, the formulation refers explicitly to social structures that have long disappeared, but the persistence of such stories throughout South Asia suggest readings no less applicable to the aloof distance of contemporary political elites.

The Tradition of Shāh Nūr

These themes are also reflected in the rich oral tradition describing the deeds of Shāh Nūr. Awrangzeb is once again the royal figure to feature in these stories and, as in the oral tradition of Shāh Musāfir, he is regarded as a devotee of the saint. In this pattern of shared claims to Awrangzeb's discipleship we see the quiet competing of the city's shrines for the ultimate client. More than the tradition of Shāh Palangpōsh and Shāh Musāfir, the oral traditions surrounding Shāh Nūr locate themselves against a background of specific historical events and personages. In doing so, the traditions not only formulate a rhetoric of historical authenticity, they also make a challenge to the historical past in demanding a meaningful hermeneusis of past events. This is seen most clearly in the moral dimension to the stories, laying emphasis on the virtues of repentance, devotion and

sincerity.³³ Reflecting the conventions of premodern Persian historiography once again, this was the creation of history with a moral meaning.³⁴

In one narrative, convinced by the devotion of his 'prime-minister' Diyānat Khān, Awrangzeb comes to Shāh Nūr in repentance for the execution of the ecstatic Sufi Sarmad.³⁵ Shāh Nūr then advised him that it would be advantageous for him to be buried in the holy earth of Aurangabad after his death, a reference to the emperor's eventual place of burial nearby in the shrine of Zayn al-dīn Shīrāzī at Khuldabad.³⁶ As in the Panchakki narrative, here clients of one of the Aurangabad shrines try to resolve the issue of the supremacy of their shrine's status in the face of an imperial burial within a rival saintly geography, in this case by positing the power and influence of Shāh Nūr rather than that of Zayn al-dīn himself as the force behind Awrangzeb's burial. Such themes of competition between Muslim saints form a persistent feature of the oral traditions of Sufi saints in South Asia and beyond.

In another narrative, Awrangzeb seeks the miraculous help of Shāh Nūr in order to summon his dead father, Shah Jahan. The emperor seeks forgiveness for rebelling and imprisoning his father and so, by extension, to avoid the torment of hellfire. The powerful moral dimension to the story also reflects on the duty of loyalty to ties of kinship. In this narrative it was once again through Diyānat Khān that Awrangzeb came to hear of the powers of the saint. The narrative begins during one of the emperor's morning tours of inspection.

Aurangzeb was in his royal garments. He said, '*Salām alaykum*,' and Shāh Nūr said, '*Wa alaykum salām* and go away. I have nothing.' So he [Aurangzeb] went away. And the next day he went again in the same garments, and again Shāh Nūr said, 'Go away: I have nothing.' And on the third day he came in the dress of a *faqīr*. Shāh Nūr said, 'Sit down,' and asked, 'What do you want?' He said, 'I want to meet my father.' Shāh Nūr asked, 'For what reason?' Awrangzeb said, 'I want to request his pardon.' He [Shah Jahan] was dead. Awrangzeb had punished him a lot and imprisoned him, so he wanted to ask for his pardon. So Shāh Nūr said, 'Good. You should read Quran Sharif for the whole night

³³ For a recent study of the role of morality in an Indian oral tradition, see S. Blackburn, *Moral Fictions: Tamil Folktales in Oral Tradition* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2001).

³⁴ Cf. J. S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

³⁵ Awrangzeb had in fact executed this famous ecstatic Sufi in 1072/1661.

³⁶ Sharrafuddin Siddiqui, head of Shāh Nūr's shrine committee, interview, 12.12.99.

and come to meet me at dawn (*fajr*).’ [Awrangzeb] said, ‘Good,’ and when he came [again] it was dawn. He [Shāh Nūr] was in the room and he left it and drew the curtain and said, ‘Speak!’ So he [Awrangzeb] talked to Shah Jahan and asked for his forgiveness. Then he went back and said, ‘Now I want to do something for you.’ But he [Shāh Nūr] said, ‘I don’t want anything from you.’ So Awrangzeb left.³⁷

The story highlights the relative possession of power by the saint and the king through a reversal of the usual patronal relationship in which both kingship and more modern political ties are conceived. Here Shāh Nūr, the epitome of the penniless dervish, was the patron and Awrangzeb, the emperor, the pleader. Such tales certainly have a long provenance and Awrangzeb’s contemporary historian Khāfī Khān, recounted a story of the would-be emperor paying a visit to the *khānaqāh* of one Shaykh Burhān at Burhanpur while disguised in normal clothing at the time of the war of succession with his brothers. According to Khāfī Khān, Awrangzeb accosted the Sufi on his way from the mosque and on declaring his brother Dara Shikuh irreligious and promising to himself uphold the *sharī‘ah* managed to procure the saint’s blessing.³⁸ The Venetian traveller Niccolò Manucci (d. *circa* 1717) also recounted a more eerie story of a visit by Awrangzeb to a ‘magician’ in 1702 to ask which of his sons would become emperor and to destroy the others. Matters clearly went astray, however, when four reversed heads appeared at the bottom of the royal bed and the magician subsequently (if incorrectly) told the emperor that none of the princes would be allowed to reign.³⁹ Needless to say, kings have long been the subject of the kind of subversive narratives, rumoured histories and plain slander whose character and structure sometimes overlap between the oral and written registers.

However, the most famous story about Shāh Nūr referred not to Awrangzeb himself but to Shāh Nūr’s miraculous assistance of his *dīwān* Diyānat Khān in the retrieval of an important file from his home in distant Delhi. Without the file, Diyānat Khān would lose his appointment at court and, it is hinted, probably also his life.

³⁷ Abdul Hamid Khan, *khādim* at Shāh Nūr’s *hujrah* in the Mochiwara quarter of Aurangabad, interview, 20.2.00. A similar story of a father’s desire to see his dead son was recorded with reference to ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilānī at Pānīpat. See W. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 99.

³⁸ Khāfī Khān, *Muntakhab al-Lubāb: Khafī Khan’s History of ‘Alamgir*, trans. S. Moinul Haq (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1975), pp. 544–5.

³⁹ Niccolò Manucci, *Storia de Mogor; or, Mogul India, 1653–1708*, by Niccolao Manucci, Venetian, trans. W. Irvine (London: J. Murray, 1907–8), vol. 3, p. 202.

Awrangzeb's *wazīr* was Diyānat Khān. One day Awrangzeb said in his court, 'Tomorrow is the date of that case and you [Diyānat Khān] should bring the file.' So Diyānat Khān agreed. But because he had left the file in Delhi, the file was not there, even though before the emperor he agreed because he was worried. When the court (*darbār*) was over, he went to Shāh Nūr at Mōchīwārā and put the whole situation before him. 'Huzūr, the story is like this. I left the file in Delhi and tomorrow I have to submit the file in the court of the emperor. So if you help me it can be done, otherwise your servant will leave this life.' He [Shāh Nūr] said, 'Well said. Bring the carriage after *'ishā* prayers.' After [the time of] *'ishā*, Diyānat Khān came with the carriage and four horses. So he [Diyānat Khān] sat in the carriage and started towards Delhi. At the end of Aurangabad there is the Delhi Gate. When they reached there, he [Shāh Nūr] asked Diyānat Khān, '*Bhāī*, what place is this?' And Diyānat Khān replied, 'Huzūr, it is the Delhi Gate.' He [Shāh Nūr] replied, '*Bi hamdi'llāh*, it is Delhi.' And so then they were in Delhi. Diyānat Khān happily entered his house and came back with the file and they returned to Aurangabad as they had come. In the morning, he presented the file at the imperial court. Awrangzeb was a great face-reader (*kiyāfah-shinār*) and could guess everything from a face and that guess would be correct. So he said, 'Diyānat Khān, yesterday you did not have the file.' Diyānat Khān replied, 'No, *huzūr*, I did not.' 'Then how did you get it today?' So he narrated the whole story of the miracle (*karāmat*) of Shāh Nūr. After that Awrangzeb went before Hazrat.⁴⁰

Here Shāh Nūr is seen to have power not only over the courtiers who came to seek his help, but also power over the very forces of nature. Yet the narrative also demonstrates the importance of the theme of bureaucratic affairs in the cult of Shāh Nūr. This is a *topos* that becomes more understandable when seen in the context of the shrine's erstwhile clientele, for prior to the dissolution of Hyderabad State the shrine counted many members of Hyderabad's bureaucratic class among its clients. In the story of the lost file we see the character and workaday requests of this clientele, the city's glorious past and the power of the saint all drawn together. The narrative in this way forms a sanctified epitome of bureaucratic worries by involving the miraculous powers of a saint with the mundane affairs of the office. It is at once a declaration of saintly power, an imaging of the shrine's history and an advertisement of the kinds of services available there. So effective has this influence of the demands of an earlier clientele been on the oral tradition of the shrine that the story has become the most famous of all Shāh Nūr's miracles. Helping in the solution

⁴⁰ Dada Pir, devotee of Shāh Nūr and *murīd* of the son of the reviver of the Shāh Nūr's cult, Shams al-dīn, interview, 19.10.99.

of bureaucratic entanglements, a pressing and persistent problem in modern India, has thus become one of the saint's specialities.⁴¹

Another narrative about Shāh Nūr and Diyānat Khān has similar roles. Reflecting the theme of the authority of the Sufi over the possessor of worldly power, it too at the same time demonstrates the kinds of issues with which the saint might help his devotees. Like many of the sickly supplicants at Shāh Nūr's shrine, the *wazīr* Diyānat Khān was afflicted with dysentery.

[Diyānat Khān] got worried. Every day he would always go to Shāh Nūr. But for this reason he couldn't go for two or three days. One day he went there with great difficulty. He made his salaams. He was ordered to sit and he sat down. A disciple (*murīd*) brought *bajrī* bread and aubergine *bhurtah*. So he ordered Diyānat Khān to eat. He was frightened that because both of the things are very 'hot' [i.e. hot in nature], and since he was a victim of dysentery his problems would be worse. Again he [Shāh Nūr] said, "Eat it!" And he ate it, and as soon as he ate it, the dysentery was gone. And he became completely healthy. After that he never thought of leaving him [Shāh Nūr]. He was ready to leave his ministership, but not Hazrat. And even in the time of his death he said, 'After death I will be here.' He said to Awrangzeb, 'I don't want the ministership. Take my resignation. I will simply stay here.' It was his [Shāh Nūr's] miracle (*karāmat*).⁴²

Here we see an extraordinary interface between history and daily life. The illnesses, particularly stomach disorders, that so often plague the modern-day clientele of the shrine are here transmogrified into sacred history through the identification of personal pain and misery with the suffering of the pious minister and its miraculous cure by the saint. This is past history as future hope.

The Tradition of Nizām al-dīn

Although Shāh Nūr and the saints of Panchakki are all related to the city's rulers in oral tradition, it is the narrative career of Aurangabad's most famous saint, Nizām al-dīn, that has made the most ambitious claims to jurisdiction over the earlier Muslim rulers of the Deccan.

⁴¹ Ewing has described the similar roles of living saints in contemporary Pakistan. See K. P. Ewing, 'The Modern Businessman and the Pakistani Saint: The Interpenetration of Worlds', in G. M. Smith and C. W. Ernst (eds), *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993) and K. P. Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴² Shivaji, a Hindu devotee of Shāh Nūr, interview, 15.1.00.

This was achieved through the story of Nizām al-dīn's association with the founder of Hyderabad State, Nizām al-Mulk, a tradition that was well known throughout the Deccan.⁴³ In Aurangabad, one version of the famous meeting describes Nizām al-dīn as sitting under the tree in his *khānaqāh* that now stands adjacent to his mausoleum when his devotee Qilīch Khān (the future Nizām al-Mulk) arrived to see him. During this meeting, Nizām al-dīn predicts that Qilīch Khān would come to rule a great kingdom, handing him seven of the nine flat breads (*rōtīs*) that he held in his hands. After this, Nizām al-Mulk chose yellow (by tradition, the favourite colour of Nizām al-dīn) and the round shape of the *rōtī* for the design of his flag. The modern-day narrator added the exegesis that always accompanies this tradition by explaining that as the Sufi had symbolically predicted, the dynasty of Nizām al-Mulk ended two centuries later in 1948 with the seventh of his descendants to rule with the title of Āsaf Jāh.⁴⁴

In another version of the story, Qilīch Khān comes to Nizām al-dīn asking his permission to found a new state named after himself, but the Sufi refuses permission unless the state and the title of its ruler were named after himself, that is Nizām al-dīn. Qilīch Khān agreed and this, the narrator explained, was how he came to adopt the nomenclature of 'Nizam'.⁴⁵ Once again, historical agency was taken away from kings—for it was the emperor Farukh Siyar who had awarded Qilīch Khān the title of Nizām al-Mulk in Delhi in 1125/1713—and put into the hands of the saints. In yet another version of the story, the hungry Nizām al-Mulk eats the seven *rōtīs* and then asks for more, which Nizām al-dīn denies him before explaining the meaning of the gift.⁴⁶

⁴³ The connection of the two figures also occurs in written sources. Indeed, in his *masnawī* poem entitled *Fakhriyyat al-Nizām*, Nizām al-Mulk's grandson 'Imād al-Mulk Firūz Jang III (d.1215/1800) claimed that Nizām al-Mulk had undertaken a Sufi initiation (*bay'at*) at the hands of Nizām al-dīn. See 'Imād al-Mulk Ghāzī al-dīn Khān, *Masnawī-ye-Fakhriyyat al-Nizām*, ms, pp. 92–3. I have consulted a copy held at the shrine of Nizām al-dīn in Aurangabad.

⁴⁴ Anonymous visitor to the shrine of Nizām al-dīn, interview, 18.10.99. A similar version of this story is given in M. Z. A. Shakeb, 'The Role of the Sufis in the Changing Society of the Deccan, 1500–1750', in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan (eds), *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. 3, *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750)* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), p. 375.

⁴⁵ Yaqub Ali, devotee of Nizām al-dīn and *murīd* of the late *sajjādah nashīn* of the shrine Qaysar Miyān, interview, 29.10.99.

⁴⁶ Bashir Nawaz, resident of Aurangabad, 8.1.00. Another version in which Nizām al-Mulk could eat no more than seven loaves is recorded in N. Luther, *Hyderabad* (Delhi: Government of India Publications Division, 1997), pp. 6–7.

In the various versions of this narrative, the Sufi Nizām al-dīn is given power not only over the destiny of the temporal ruler of the Deccan (and by extension over all of his descendants), but also over the very land of the Deccan and its existence as an independent polity apart from the territories of the north. Refiguring one of the major events of the eighteenth century, these traditions claim that it was Nizām al-dīn and not Nizām al-Mulk who had re-established the Deccan's independence from Delhi by founding a state that would endure until the middle of the twentieth century. Nizām al-dīn, the southern representative of the great lineage of Chishtī saints founded in Delhi by his earlier namesake Nizām al-dīn Awliyā (d.725/1325), is seen here to be the shaping force behind the Deccan's history. According to this narrative the Muslims of Aurangabad, as represented by their patron saint Nizām al-dīn, were not peripheral to the Deccan's political history as populist Maratha revisionism would have it, but were at once its visible and invisible architects.

However, just as in Aurangabad itself the different narrative traditions of the city's saints competed for influence over Awrangzeb and the other rulers of the region, so was Nizām al-dīn's influence over the first ruler of Hyderabad State itself disputed elsewhere in the state's former territories. In the city of Hyderabad itself, in modern times the story has not always been connected with any particular saint and it is sometimes merely an unknown dervish who makes the mysterious prediction.⁴⁷ In another oral tradition from Balapur in the north of the Deccan, it is the Naqshbandī saint Shāh 'Ināyat Allāh (d.1117/1705) who is placed in Nizām al-dīn's role in the narrative.⁴⁸ Like the oral tradition in Aurangabad, such narrative associations must be seen in the living context of a shrine's maintenance of a flourishing clientele. They are also rival appropriations of history itself at this same cultic level.

Nevertheless, the Balapur version may point to an older version of the story than the one associating it with Nizām al-dīn. The Deccan historian Lālā Mansārām's eighteenth-century chronicle of the deeds of Nizām al-Mulk refers to the ruler's attachment to a dervish named Shāh 'Ināyat Muḥtabah. It adds that this dervish made a prediction about Nizām al-Mulk's future greatness and that the ruler always

⁴⁷ Luther (1997), pp. 6–7.

⁴⁸ Zahir ul-Islam Naqshbandi, brother of the current *sajjādah nashīn* of Shāh 'Ināyat, interview, Balapur, 28.9.00. Shāh 'Ināyat Allāh (d.1117/1705) studied in Burhanpur before settling in Balapur where he founded his *khānaqāh* in 1059/1649.

bore the dervish's standard into battle as his personal insignia.⁴⁹ This tradition clearly echoes Nizām al-dīn's claim of originating the Hyderabad flag and was perhaps connected to the fact that one of Nizām al-Mulk's most important battles for control of the Deccan was fought outside the small town of Balapur. For like the shrines of Aurangabad, Shāh 'Ināyat Allāh's shrine on the edge of Balapur cherishes similar traditions associating its origins to the generosity of royal and aristocratic patrons during the Deccan's Mughal and early Āsaf Jāh period.⁵⁰ Indeed, the extremely ornate shrine at Balapur echoes those of Aurangabad in being built in a polished rendition of the Mughal baroque familiar from Aurangabad. As at Panchakki, architecture acts as the proof of the spoken word.

Once again we see how power and prestige has been contested between the followers of different Muslim saints, as no less between the different Sufi orders (*turuq*) which they represented. But what is most interesting is that it was not the story of the seven *rōlūs* as such that was disputed, but rather Nizām al-dīn's place within it. Here, the manner of Nizām al-dīn's displacement in the story is testament to the intrinsic power of narrative, for it suggests that more important than a given Sufi saint *per se* was the power to re-imagine and re-present the past that was inherent in the creation of historical narrative itself.

However, to turn again to the Aurangabad tradition, Nizām al-dīn's influence is also seen to be behind the history of the region in other ways. As an epilogue to the story of the seven loaves described matters,

After becoming emperor he [Nizām al-Mulk] made Aurangabad his capital. So Nizām al-dīn said, 'Two Nizams cannot stay in one place, so you must go from here.' So the Nizam went to Hyderabad.⁵¹

In this narrative we see a reflection of the concept of the territorial *wilāyat* of a Sufi saint. Though more commonly interpreted as referring to a region of solely spiritual jurisdiction, this idea also contains the kind of political dimension that is inherent in any geography of the

⁴⁹ Long sections of this biography are translated in P. S. M. Rao, *Eighteenth Century Deccan* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1963), pp. 46–131. For the description of the dervish, his prediction and insignia, see p. 95.

⁵⁰ Naqshbandī (1417/1996), pp. 13–20.

⁵¹ Nurul Hasnayn, resident of Aurangabad, interview, 18.1.00.

sacred.⁵² Indeed, in administrative vocabulary *wilāyat* did often refer to a region under a given regime's political control.⁵³

Nizām al-dīn's role as saintly *éminence grise* behind the foundation of Hyderabad was further demonstrated in another well-known tradition relating to Nizām al-Mulk's victory at the battle of Shakar Kera in 1137/1724 which brought him lasting control of the Deccan.

The Nizam had no value at the court due to the Sayyid brothers.⁵⁴ Before coming here, he thought he should meet Shāh Kalīm Allāh⁵⁵ and ask him for a prayer (*du'ā*) and inform him that he was going to the Deccan.⁵⁶ So he went and asked for the prayers. Shāh Kalīm Allāh said, 'I gave the Deccan to Nizām [al-dīn], so you should go and ask him.' He said to Shāh Kalīm Allāh, 'Please give me a letter.' So he said, 'Bring something to write with.' But there was nothing, so he took a potsherd (*thikrī*) and wrote on it, 'The dog of the world is coming, so give him something.' So he [the Nizam] put that potsherd in his turban and came to the Deccan. When he came close to the Deccan, Nizām al-dīn began to say, 'There is a scent of my *pīr* coming! See if there is anyone coming!'⁵⁷ So they came to know that the Nizam was coming, and when the

⁵² See B. Radtke, 'The Concept of *wilaya* in Early Sufism', in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi* (London: Khanaqahi Nimatulahi Press, 1993) and J. F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in J. F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988). In extreme cases, as with the Safawī Sufi order that transformed itself into the Safavid dynasty of Iran, the influence of such a doctrine could lead a saint's representatives to combine these strands of spiritual and political authority and overthrow the existing political order. Such overlapping was also common in South Asia and the Mughal emperors adopted the Sufi vocabulary of spiritual master and disciple at court in referring to themselves and their courtiers in the terms of the *murshid* and *murīd*.

⁵³ '*Walāyat* or *wilāyat* ... dominion, realm, province, government; an inhabited country, a region ... *sāhib-e walāyat*, s.m. A saint.' See J. T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindī and English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), p. 1200.

⁵⁴ On these major players in eighteenth century politics, see S. A. A. Rizvi, *Shāh Walī Allāh and his Times* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House, 1980), pp. 110–73.

⁵⁵ Shāh Kalīm Allāh of Delhi (d. 1142/1729) was the Sufi master of Nizām al-dīn who had originally instructed him to travel to the Deccan.

⁵⁶ In fact, prayers were often said to Sufi masters at shrines by rulers prior to declarations of independence or new conquests. In 798/1396 Muzaffar Khān, the Tughluq governor of Gujarat, proclaimed his independence straight after praying at the shrine of Mu'in al-dīn Chishtī at Ajmer, while Babur came to give prayers of thanks at the shrine of Bakhtiyār Kākī upon his conquest of Delhi in 932/1526. See R. M. Eaton, 'The Articulation of Islamic Space in the Medieval Deccan', in I. A. Bierman (ed.), *Islam on the Margins* (Los Angeles: Center for Near Eastern Studies UCLA, 2000), p. 253.

⁵⁷ The motif of the master's sacred odour is a well-known one and the well-known nineteenth century hagiographer Ghulām Sarwar Lāhawrī also used the motif in describing Nizām al-dīn's first encounter with his master Shāh Kalīm Allāh. See Ghulām Sarwar Lāhawrī, *Khazīnat al-Asfiyā* (Kanpur, n.p., 1312/1894), p. 464. The

Nizam came, Nizām al-dīn bowed in respect. The people said, 'The Sufi will never bow before anyone. How has this happened?' So Nizām al-dīn said, 'In his turban there is a letter from my *murshid*, and I bow in honour of that.' He [the Nizam] presented him [Nizām al-dīn] with the letter and asked for food. So he [Nizām al-dīn] gave him seven pieces of roti (*rōṭī kē tukrē*). And history shows that in his dynasty there were only seven emperors. When he [the Nizam] came to the Deccan he was very worried. The Deccan was under Mubārīz Khān. He was very well placed and his army was bigger than that of the Nizām. So he asked Nizām al-dīn, 'Must I fight Mubārīz Khān?' And the *murshid* replied, 'Yes.' Mubārīz Khān was also a *murīd* of another Sufi, whose name was something like Bakrēwālā Pīr. He gave Mubārīz Khān a blanket (*kambal*), and said, 'While you have this blanket no-one can defeat you.' And he [Nizām al-dīn] told him [the Nizam], 'Erect a clean and tidy tent and set a guard there and no-one must go inside until I enter.' And in the tent he [Nizām al-dīn] was busy worshipping (*ibādat*) for the entire night, and the army was standing guard outside. After the *fajr* prayer, he [Nizām al-dīn] asked his disciples, 'Is the Nizam here?' So he [the Nizam] came forward and salaamed him. And Nizām al-dīn told him, 'Go to your tent.' When he went there, he saw that the blanket was there. Nizām al-dīn said, 'Thank God! The blanket has come, and now you must attack and you will win.' But the Nizam was worried, and said, 'Show me a clear sign (*nishān*) of winning and then I will fight.' So [Nizām al-dīn] said, 'Good. When you see the marks of handprints on the cloth of your tent, that will be a clear sign of your victory and that will be the day of your victory.' And the whole army came to know of this and everyone was saying that the Nizam would win if there would be handprints. And one day the handprints were seen on every tent. The Nizam attacked and won and became emperor.⁵⁸

Such tales of Sufis and battlefields have long been known in different forms throughout the Deccan. Another such oral tradition concerns Nizām al-dīn's Chishtī co-disciples of Shāh Kalīm Allāh, the well-known Hyderabadī saints Shāh Yūsuf al-dīn Qādirī (d. 1121/1709) and Shāh Sharāf al-dīn Qādirī (d.c. 1121/1709). Like Nizām al-dīn, both saints travelled in the Deccan with the Mughal armies of conquest and a tradition known with regard to them in Hyderabad and Delhi reflects the setting in the imperial camp of the previous tradition relating to Nizām al-dīn. The timing of the narrative, like that of Nizām al-dīn's

story of the scent of the approaching *pīr* was also known in a version relating to Nizām al-dīn Awliyā of Delhi.

⁵⁸ Nurul Hasnain, interview, 18.1.00. In another version (Syed Hassan, devotee of Nizām al-dīn, interview, 16.2.00), the second Sufi is named Shaykh Chādarpoṣh, with whom Nizām al-dīn was 'fighting a spiritual war'. The handprints in this alternative version were described as yellow, the favourite colour of Nizām al-dīn. By the early twentieth century, the story of the battle entered the textual tradition and a short account is given in Malkapūrī (1331/1912-13), pp. 1097-8.

intercession at the battle of Shakar Khera, is decisively fixed within a clear historical framework and relates to the Mughal conquest of Golkonda in 1098/1687.

According to this tradition the saints were in their tent one night reading the Quran when apart from their tent the whole camp was flattened by a great storm. In this tradition the princely supplicant was Awrangzeb, who immediately came to the saints' tent to beg for help with his campaign, the camp being situated near to the great fort of the Qutb Shāh rulers at Golkonda. After persistent requests, the saints submitted and wrote a message with charcoal on a piece of country tile and then ordered the emperor to deliver it to a cobbler—in fact a *santo incognito*—residing just beneath the fort. Awrangzeb returned from the cobbler with a message in reply, which explained that there was a great spiritual force protecting the fort. Greatly distressed, the emperor begged the saints to help him once again and in response the saints wrote another message to the cobbler. On receipt of this queer rustic message the saintly cobbler immediately stood up in a frenzy and left his post of guarding the fort. Sure enough, Golkonda fell to the armies of Awrangzeb through the saints' efforts the following day.⁵⁹ Such battlefield and siege stories also registered in the Persian historiographical tradition in the Deccan and the early nineteenth century *Tazkirat al-bilād wa'l hukām* of Mīr Husayn 'Alī Kirmānī (d. after 1225/1810) records the help given to Munawwar Khān by the wandering Sufi Shāh Miskīn Majzūb during his siege of Kurnool and in his subsequent encounter with the ruler of Mysore Haydar 'Alī.⁶⁰

In both this narrative and that of Nizām al-dīn's help on the battlefield we see the same motifs of the cryptic ostrocon, the army camp, the morose prince and the final military victory with the saints' understated and mysterious help. Like narrative itself, the saints seem to rely on the same repertoire of special effects. But as well as transforming political history into *Heilsgeschichte*, the imprecise nature of the saints' help is significant in relation to the kinds of miracles witnessed by the saints' modern-day clients. For whatever their actual effect, the precise means of saintly miracles are described

⁵⁹ This version is recorded in D. Prasad, *Saints of Telangana* (Hyderabad: Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, 1969), pp. 11–2. However it is also known in Aurangabad and another version of the story was related to me in September 2003 in Delhi by a *khādim* of the shrine of the saints' master Kalīm Allāh.

⁶⁰ See Meer Husain Ali Kirmani, *Tazkirath-ul-Bilad wal Hukkam*, trans. S. A. Shariff (Mysore: Aftab-e-Karnataka Press, 1996), pp. 252–4.

like those employed by the saints in the battlefield narratives as more often subtle than spectacular. In this sense, such narratives also act as prototypes of the ways of modest and oblique miracle-making favoured by the saints against which clients might assess fortunate episodes within their own lives. Mirroring past and present experience, they form a means by which collective and private history can intersect.

In the narrative tradition associating Nizām al-dīn with the foundation of Hyderabad State we see the reflection of a widespread concern with questions of origins. For the narrative of the *rōtīs* also provided an aetiological charter for Hyderabad State, diminishing the moral culpability of its first ruler Nizām al-Mulk for breaking faith with his imperial master in Delhi by detaching the Deccan from the rest of the Mughal imperium. In a retrospective gilding of historical memory the story in this way served to legitimize a state whose origins were frequently viewed as more opportunist than ennobling.⁶¹ Hyderabad State's connections to the Mughal past remained politically important right up to its dissolution. For this reason the Nizams continued to attend the death anniversary (*urs*) of Awrangzeb at Khuldabad until the mid-twentieth century, ritually approaching the imperial tomb there as barefooted vassals. Whether featuring Nizām al-dīn or his rival Shāh 'Ināyat Allāh, for those in Aurangabad who at the end of the twentieth century chose to remember Hyderabad State as part of their historical identity, the narrative of the *rōtīs* lent the former state both a measure of dignity and a sense of divine purpose that must be seen against the wider catastrophe of Muslim India under British rule and the position in which many Hyderabadī Muslims later saw themselves in independent India.

In South Asia as throughout the Islamic world, such foundation stories have long been associated with Sufi figures and provide some of the most memorable narratives in many Muslim historical traditions in both textual and oral form.⁶² In the Deccan it was the story of Nizām

⁶¹ For modern South Asian readings of Nizām al-Mulk's political status, see Y. Husain, *The First Nizam: The Life and Times of Nizāmu'l-Mulk Asaf Jāh I* (London: Asia Publishing, 1963) and M. A. Nayeem, 'Political Status of Nizamu'l Mulk Asaf Jah-I in the Deccan (1713-1748 A.D.)', in M. Taher (ed.), *Encyclopaedic Survey of Islamic Culture*, Vol. 6, *Muslim Rule in Deccan* (Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997).

⁶² See D. DeWeese, 'Sacred History for a Central Asian Town: Saints, Shrines and Legends of Origin in Histories of Sayrām, 18th to 19th Centuries', *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 89-90 (2000) and C. S. Taylor, 'Sacred History and the Cult of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt', *Muslim World* 80, 2 (1990).

al-dīn and Nizām al-Mulk that became the most famous of these in that it related to the formation of the last significant Muslim state in the region. A similar narrative relates to the foundation of another eighteenth century successor state, whereby the wandering dervish Sābir Shāh grants Ahmad Shāh Abdālī (1160/1747–1187/1773) the nascent state of Afghanistan by placing a wheat crown upon his head during his coronation ceremony.⁶³ As we have seen, even the historian Khāfī Khān described a visit by Awrangzeb to Shaykh Burhān at Burhanpur during the course of which the Sufi confirmed Awrangzeb's kingship.⁶⁴ Comparable stories earlier related to the pre-Mughal Muslim cities and rulers of the Deccan. The Deccan entrepôt of Burhanpur was thus claimed to have been mystically founded by the Sufi Burhān al-dīn Gharīb (d.738/1337) of Khuldabad, while the rule of the Qutb Shāhs of Golkonda was similarly seen to have had such Sufi origins. Golkonda's last ruler Abū'l Hasan Tānā Shāh (d.1111/1699) was also claimed to have been elevated to kingship through the powers of the descendants of Shāh Rājū Qattāl, at whose shrine in Khuldabad he was later buried.⁶⁵ In neighbouring Gujarat the foundation of Ahmadabad was long associated with its Sufi namesake, Ahmad Khattū (d.850/1446), at whose shrine in the city several of the sultans of Gujarat lie buried.⁶⁶ These issues of collective genesis, of state, city and local community, later formed one of the main themes of the oral tradition of the Aurangabad shrines.

Yet such traditions were by no means the unique preserve of Muslim saints and many comparable traditions exist with regard to Hindu holy figures, *nāth* yogis in particular. These traditions also existed within a narrative framework characterised by accounts of genuine political events and in this way served to reinterpret history in a theocentric and at times plainly cultic direction. One example of relevance to the Aurangabad traditions is the account of the foundation of the state of Nepal in 1768 by Prthivinārāyan Shāh with the aid of

⁶³ See Muhammad Ali, 'Ahmad Shāh Bābā: Father of the Nation', *Afghanistan* 18 (1963). See also A. A. Kohzad, 'Huits légendes concernant la fondation de la ville de Herat', *Afghanistan* 4 (1951).

⁶⁴ Khāfī Khān (1975), pp. 13 and 544–5.

⁶⁵ On Burhanpur, see C. W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 227–30. On the Qutb Shāhs, see H. K. Sherwani, *History of Qutb Shāhi Dynasty* (Delhi: Munshiram, 1974), pp. 601–2.

⁶⁶ See Z. A. Desai, 'The Major Dargahs of Ahmadabad' in C. W. Troll (ed.), *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 76–81.

the *nāth* yogi Bhagavantānāth.⁶⁷ The similar role of Mastnāth (d. *circa* 1808) in helping Mān Singh of Marwar to regain his throne from his treacherous cousin Bhīm Singh during the siege of Chittor also contains echoes of the Aurangabad traditions.⁶⁸ Like Shāh Nūr, Mastnāth also had a taste for the moral shortcomings of the Mughal emperors, while in a reflection of Nizām al-dīn's prediction of the limits of Āsaf Jāh rule one nineteenth century hagiography described Mastnāth predicting the demise of Shāh 'Ālam and the downfall of the Mughals *en somme*.

Conclusions

Narratives of interaction between saints and kings make up the most popular part of the oral tradition of Aurangabad's Sufi shrines. Rarely seen alone or dealing with the ordinary people of the world, the saint is rather encountered through narratives placing him in direct relationship with the rulers of the states which were once centred on Aurangabad. Certainly, the motif of the encounter between the king and the saint was one of the most popular of all narrative and indeed artistic motifs in South Asia, as testified by its popularity as a subject for miniature paintings.⁶⁹ It was here that the concrete visual evidence of the saints' grand shrines acted as the medium between the narrative imagination and historical fact. For as the clear outcome of grand acts of patronage the shrines made the traditions of the saints' royal following credible to their audiences. This sense of narrative reality was essential, because in the stories the saints showed their ability to have real and tangible effects upon the world, a narrative response to the daily needs that the clients of the shrines address to

⁶⁷ See V. Bouiller, 'The King and his Yogi: Prthivinarayan Śah, Bhagavantānāth and the Unification of Nepal in the Eighteenth Century' in J. P. Neelsen (ed.), *Gender, Caste and Power in South Asia: Social Status and Mobility in a Transitional Society* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991).

⁶⁸ See D. White, 'The Exemplary Life of Mastnāth: the Encapsulation of Seven Hundred Years of Nāth Siddha Hagiography' in F. Mallison (ed.), *Constructions Hagiographiques dans le monde indien: Entre mythe et histoire* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 2001).

⁶⁹ Indeed, the motif suffused all of the arts, such that the well-known musical *rāga* Kedar was interpreted by musicologists to be a great ascetic whose renown attracts even royal visitors and was depicted as such in pictorial form in many *rāgmāla* paintings. There are a number of fine examples extant from the eighteenth century Deccan. One has been published in K. Ebeling, *Rāgmāla Painting* (Basel: Ravi Kumar, 1973), p. 119.

their saintly patrons. But it also reminds us of the close and often interdependent links between architecture and the telling of history, between place and memory.

At any point in the history of a saintly cult, an ongoing tradition of oral narratives remains the proving grounds of a saint's status. For once made, saints often dwindle, fail and so fall from the collective memory of their communities. Whether in the form of shared public narratives like those described above or of private individual accounts of personal saintly interventions, oral narratives play a crucial role in preventing such cult failure. Accessible to literate and non-literate clienteles, adaptable to changing social circumstances and capable of shifting nuances according to the needs of their audiences, such living narratives possess many intrinsic advantages (as well as disadvantages) over their written counterparts. Oral narrative traditions may for these reasons be seen as the lifeblood of the saints.

The traditions also show how the power and prestige of the Muslim saints of Aurangabad was inseparable from their city's early golden age. Although in their ongoing posthumous careers the saints moved through time, through the recounting of the deeds enacted long ago during their mortal careers they also carried history along with them. When the Muslim kings of the Deccan had long disappeared, their universe lingered on in narratives preserving a history for their recitational communities that was structured around the relatively firm anchorage of the figure of a saint rendered permanent by the presence of his shrine. Oral traditions form a self-history for the communities attached to such shrines. In a contrast that visitors to Aurangabad's shrines often draw, while the tomb of Aurangabad's initial founder Malik 'Anbar lies forgotten and neglected at Khuldabad the shrines of the saints buried nearby are still filled with visitors who can recount story after story of their lives.

Such remarks remind us that it was invariably the memory of the saints, shored-up by shrine, narrative and ritual practice, that lingered when almost everything else of their age was forgotten. Standing at once in both the present and the past and entwining the details of their own highly localized careers with grander episodes in the history of the Deccan at large, Aurangabad's saints and their narrative traditions have helped to both shape and transmit a sense of historical identity among their recitational communities that is capable of mediating local and national themes into a meaningful whole. By positioning the saint at the centre of key historical events, the past was not only recollected but re-membered according to a schema placing historical

agency primarily in the hands of an elect Sufi few. The continuation in modern times of features of what might otherwise be categorized as a premodern envisioning of history was in this way an integral part of the preservation of the saintly cults in their own right, for sainthood must be continually proven by tales or displays of power. Whatever the epistemic breaks experienced by other historical traditions, the continued topographic presence of the shrines of the Sufi saints and the saints' continued miraculous intervention in the lives of their communities has in turn helped to ensure the continuity of history itself.